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AUTHOR Rivers, Wilga M.
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ABSTRACT

An examination of changing student attitudes and behavior and current foreign language programs leads the author to propose strategies for developing new attitudes toward teaching, curriculum planning, and second language learning. Noting the characteristic unrest of today's youth and the bases for it, a plea is made for teachers and administrators to rethink and redesign educational objectives realistically at all levels. A two-stage language program is proposed in which students would receive: instruction in the nature of language through a contrastive approach, an introduction to another people through language, an experience of being another people, and an experience of communicating with another people. First-year, terminal students would receive the benefit of a humanistic approach to the course as well as gaining insight into the nature of communication, while continuing students would actually begin to learn the target language during the second year with an improved attitude. (RL)

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN A TIME OF CHANGE

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Wilga M. Rivers
Department of French
University of Illinois
at Urbana

Recently, I have been reading a very interesting booklet -- the student evaluation booklet of a very well-known university -- and I read some very provocative things in it. As teachers we have been deploring the dropping of the foreign language requirement in many universities, but what does the student say?

> "As a foreign language requirement this course contains all the necessary grammar and vocabulary except for words of frustration, hostility, and anger. A good dictionary will fill in those educational gaps."

> "(This course) ruins most students' averages, it ruins their morale, it ruins their social life by staying in and studying so much, and it really ruins any desire that any would have to learn a foreign language."

As teachers we are bewildered by these reactions to our carefully structured, well designed, pedagogically sound programs. One student writes: "I sincerely urge you....to quit treating students as infants with your highly structured, fool-proof, unemotional (sequence)." So virtues become vices.

Yet we felt we were responding to the spirit of the times. Our students wanted emphasis on speaking rather than reading: didn't we give them that? No more silent classrooms: everyone could participate actively for thirty minutes

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out of thirty minutes. We provided them with the opportunity to work on their own with a "personal tutor" in the language laboratory. We gave them contemporary reading materials when they reached that stage. What has happened to our students? Where have we gone wrong? Does the fault lie with ourselves and our programs?

The title of this paper is: "Foreign Languages in a Time of Change." We may well ask: isn't every period a time of change? It has become a truism to say: Yes, but ours is a period of rapid change.

We have all heard of culture shock: it is the experience a person has in a foreign culture when suddenly all the familiar psychological cues that help him function in his own society are changed. In his new situation he has to ask himself how he should act and react to others, how he should time his actions, what is the correct social behavior. Why, he wonders, do these people seem indifferent to things which seem to him to be so important, even matters of principle. Everything in this new society is so strange and incomprehensive that he is disoriented and disturbed. In a recent book Alvin Toffler speaks of "future shock." "Future shock," he says, "is a time phenomenon, a product of the greatly accelerated rate of change in society. It arises from the superimposition of a new culture on an old one. It is culture shock in one's own society, but its impact is far worse."[1] He sees society at present as suffering from confusional breakdown.[2] We are caught in it; our students are caught in it: in a revolution in societal patterns, institutions, and values where familiar cues no longer provide a sufficient guide.

For us this is intensely confusing; for our students it is carrying them away from us fast in a developing pattern of new attitudes and values. Attitudinal changes which gradually evolved over a generation may now be effected within a decade. Unless we realize this and seek to understand these new attitudes and values the dislocation of our educational efforts will grow worse despite our well-meaning, even decisive, actions.

Many of us knew depression and war. We had to rebuild. We had to work hard, to delay gratification until we had achieved intermediate goals, to submit ourselves to years of descipline to attain the affluence we have today.

This generation is born with it and bored with it. This generation is the first in history that has a prolonged and leisure youth (as distinct from adolescence) with opportunities for intellectual, emotional, and moral development without the demands of societal responsibilities.[3] As the sociologists keep telling us, our young people are entering a post-industrial society in which many of the careers for which our generation had to prepare themselves with such assiduity will not exist (or will not exist in the forms in which we know them) when our students emerge from their prolonged youth to take their place in the larger society. To this generation, learning something to pass an examination as a passkey to career opportunities is meaningless. With "open admissions" we cannot even use acceptance into a college as a goad.

As Toffler has put it: "The technology of tomorrow requires not millions of lightly lettered men, ready to work in unison at endlessly repetitious jobs, it requires not men who take orders in unblinking fashion, aware that the price of bread is mechanical submission to authority, but men who can make critical judgments, who can weave their way through moral environments, who are quick to spot new relationships in the rapidly changing reality."[4] If as Postman and Weingartner have pointed out "a classroom is an environment and....the way it is organized carries the burden of what people will learn from it,"[5] many foreign language classrooms have been preparing students excellently for the demands of industrial as opposed to post-industrial society. Haven't we been teaching students to work in unison at endlessly repetitious tasks, and to take orders in unblinking fashion, with mechanical submission to authority?

The new society requires --

-- men who can make critical judgments;

-- who can weave their way through moral environments;

-- who are quick to spot new relationships in the rapidly changing reality.

Where does foreign language study fit into this new educational picture?

For Toffler it has no place at all. It is the first thing he eliminates. In his chapter, "Education in the Future Tense" we read: "Tens of millions of children today are forced by law to spend precious hours of their lives grinding away at material whose future utility is highly questionable. (Nobody even claims it has much present utility.) Should they spend as much time as they do learning French, or Spanish or German?"[6] Later he says:

> "Anyone who thinks the present curriculum makes sense is invited to explain to an intelligent fourteen-year-old why algebra or French or any other subject is essential for him. Adult answers are almost always evasive. The reason is simple: the present curriculum is a mindless holdover from the past."[7]

The attack is widespread. Toffler is only one voice. As foreign language teachers we cannot put our heads in the sand. Do we have an answer? It cannot be a glib one; it must come from a careful study of the situation we are in.

Let us look, then, for further information. If our youth is passing through a revolution, what are the trends of this revolution?

Here I would like to take up four illuminating observations of Professor Kenneth Keniston of the Department of Psychology at Yale. In an article: "You have to grow up in Scarsdale to know how bad things really are," he points to four trends in the thinking of our youth.[8] They are as follows:

1. A revulsion against the notion of quantity, particularly economic quantity and materialism, and a turn toward concepts

of quality. (Keniston reminds us of the slogan of the French student revolt in 1968: "Long live the passionate revolution of creative intelligence.") This brings an emphasis on quality of experience, on the expressive, the aesthetic, the creative, the imaginative, even the fantastic.

2. A revolt against uniformity, equalization, standardization, and homogenization (against the "technologization of man") with the demand that individuals be appreciated not despite their differences but because they are different, diverse, unique, and noninterchangeable.

3. A continuing struggle against psychological or institutional closure or rigidity in any form, even the rigidity of a definite adult role, and the extolling of the virtues of openness, motion, and continuing human development. (Here we may think of the present resistance to requirements -- any requirements.)

4. A revolt against centralized power and the complementary demand for participation. It is in this sense that students are demanding "relevance" in their educational program: a chance for the student to participate in his own educational experience in a way that involves all of his faculties, emotional and moral as well as intellectual.

Our highly structured system worked with another generation in another era. How can we meet the demands for quality of experience, for appreciation of difference, for openness and participation, while preparing people who can make

critical judgments and face new relationships and new attitudes, even moral ones, without reactions of shocked withdrawal?

I think as foreign language teachers we can, and I believe, moreover, that we should cease apologizing for our subject and trying to slip it in without people noticing, under the protective cloak of institutional requirements. We do have something to contribute to the whole education of adolescence and youth, but only by merely continuing to do as we have always done.

What do we need, then? Newer, more scientific methods that some guru is going to present to us in a neat package? It is certainly not new methods we need, but a new attitude: one that is less harassed and less pressure-bound by an earnest desire to teach more and more material. We need an attitude which allows the student to learn, that waits for the student to learn, that allows the student choices in what he shall learn.

In our earnestness, in our anxiety to do the best academically by our students, in the educational lag in our thinking which has carried over from the days when we had in our classrooms an elite, a chosen few, who pursued the esoteric study of a foreign tongue, we have structured and shaped learning experiences which have become homogenized and inflexible and have gradually eliminated (sometimes not so gradually) all but the fittest -- those who seemed to us to fit best into the pattern of our often stereotyped advanced courses.

Now our students reject rigidity and structure, quantity of learning, and imposed experience. No wonder there is tension and often abrasive tension. In our concentration on how students learn a foreign language, we have forgotten how students learn. To quote Earl Stevick of the Foreign Service Institute: "We must no longer look at (the learner) only as 'linguistic man' -- man regarded only as a potential internalizer and producer of alien sounds, words and patterns. Any language student is an entire social being."[9]

What have we, as foreign language teachers, to contribute to our student's quality of life, to his development of critical and moral judgment, to his ability to adapt and readapt to changing attitudes and circumstances?

I think we are ideally suited to share in this function. Isn't ours the only subject which rudely thrusts the student into inevitable contact with other modes of thought and expression and forces him to think more critically about his own, and which also gives him vicarious experience in confronting and adapting to new ideas and attitudes? This is true only if we teach the foreign language with such an end in view, not, of course, if our sole aim is the drilling of irregular verbs and the mastery of the use of accents.

As I have said elsewhere in this regard:[10]

> "The....contribution of foreign language study which is truly educational, in the sense that it expands the student's personal experience of his environment, and truly humanistic in that it adds a new dimension to his thinking is the opportunity it provides for breaking through monolingual and monocultural bonds, revealing to the student that there are other ways of saying things, other values and attitudes than those to which his native language and culture have habituated him. Through this experience he may develop new attitudes to ideas and peoples which will reduce his bondage to the familiar and the local and increase his sympathy for persons of other cultures and languages. The new generation student in our schools is internationalist and inter-culturist in his aspirations; he is also brutally direct in demanding the rationale of what we are doing and of what we are asking him to do. This basic contribution which foreign language can make to his development is one which he would welcome: but he must see that what we do in our classroom really achieves such a purpose or he will drop out as soon as he conveniently may. If as Harold Taylor has said: "The first task of education....is to raise the level of awareness and response to all ideas, events, people, and objects,"[11] then foreign language taught with this end firmly in view can still claim that it has a rightful place in the overall educational program of the school."

All this is very idealistic. What is the reality? Why do we find it so difficult to demonstrate this type of teaching in actuality?

Here we may listen to another student voice:

> "Most people forget what they learned so soon after they've finished that even those who someday make it to Europe or South America can't use it. Besides, in this electronic age, the ideal of a multilingual Renaissance man is pitifully camp. You can travel farther and learn more about 'other cultures' on acid than on a world tour."

and again:

> "too many books, to much stress on grammar, too little emphasis on their culture."

Are these complaints rather about the content than about the subject itself?

Perhaps we have been unable to get away in our thinking from the ideal which comes from the days of selective high schools and privileged undergraduates, that all foreign language students should be expected to attain near-native mastery of the language in all skills: an ideal which is impossible in the time available to us in most situations (and here I am not thinking of courses for foreign language majors). We aim at near-native mastery for all and design our courses accordingly, then we leave up to eighty per cent of the students somewhere along the way, sometimes not very far. When they realize how little they know and how little they can use it, they become frustrated and hostile, and they grow into parents and community leaders opposed to such an experience for their children. How familiar this is to all of us! Can we realistically claim that <u>all</u> students need to attain this kind of language mastery?

We must decide what it is that we want every student to carry away even from one year's experience of foreign language study. If it is a change in attitude and in his attitude to his own language and to language and communication as such--then we must design our program so that such an outcome is really achieved and evident. I submit that we have been giving too much thought to the formal structure of our programs while retaining the same old content: individualized instruction,

computer-assisted instruction, writing behavioral objectives, systems approaches, or what you will, are still tailored to the present and future tense in Level One, the past and conditional tense in Level Two, the awesome subjunctive in Level Three.

At this point let me insert a warning. We cannot shift gears and move from an emphasis on skill-learning to the changing of attitudes without knowing something about the whole question of the effect of prior attitudes on the learning of controversial material; otherwise we may very well reinforce prejudices. We know that controversial material which fits in with our existing evaluative framework is readily retained whereas we tend to retain implausible material from the other side. In fact in their initial selection for retention from what we give them our students may misunderstand, distort, discount, or even reverse, in accordance with their own biases, the implications of what they are hearing, seeing, or reading.[12] Then if we limit ourselves to facts about a particular culture, these are very perishable, as we well know, and we may unwittingly be increasing the possibility of culture shock for our students when they encounter the realities, rather then helping them to understand what they see or hear. The attitude of the teacher who is dazzled and can see no wrong in the foreign culture can arouse rigidity and hostility. What we are out to develop is an openness to new ideas and new ways of expression and a tolerance of difference. We must learn how to achieve this.

What about this high percentage of our students (seventy or eighty per cent in many cases) who will never be with us long enough to achieve mastery? Should we be honest and say we cannot give them anything which is worthwhile in the year or two they are with us? Or can we take a look at our programs and restructure them?

Here I am going to propose that whatever our situation: college, high school, junior high school, elementary school -- wherever foreign language study is begun -- we design a two-stage program.

Stage One would be designed as terminal, designed so that whoever passed through it would have gained something of educational and humanistic value, even if he never studied a foreign language again in his lifetime. This would also be the stage for creating interest and enthusiasm in some, who would then wish to go on to Stage Two because they really wanted to master the language. Stage One would then be an end in itself and not merely the elementary stage of Stage Two, and certainly not pre - anything.

What would we aim for in Stage One? At the moment, I would say four things.

First: An introduction to language itself through a specific foreign language, gearing our study to the way language operations express meanings and the many ways meanings can be encoded; the way our language expresses our way of looking at things and the way another language expresses another people's way of looking at things. This study would be frankly contrastive.

For many years we have professed to be teaching our students to understand how language operates and to understand the operation of their own language better through the study of a foreign language. Most of this protestation has been lip-service. Are we really going to work out how to do this interestingly and significantly?

Second: an introduction to another people through language: the way another people thinks, feels, values and acts in contradistinction to our own preoccupations, attitudes, and reactions. (This I have already talked about at some length.)

Third: An experience of being another people, communicating as they do, acting as they do, relating as they do. Here our students learn the language and live the language. Language knowledge acquired as immediately acted out. Rules internalized become channels of communication. Practice in production is immediately incorporated into some form of authentic interaction.

Fourth: An experience of communicating with another people: speaking with them (where possible), writing to them, working and playing with them where a neighboring community makes this possible, sharing with them in joint or exchange projects. (Here I would call your attention to a recent article of Dwight Bolinger of Harvard: "Let's Change our Base of Operations" in the Modern Language Journal 25,3 (March, 1971), pp. 148-156.)

Methodologically we would aim at involvement of all students in planning, in group reserach and interaction, in interdisciplinary exploration, in human contacts in nearby communities or through correspondence.

Such a course would not be a waste of time for those who wished to master the language. It would foster attitudes which would carry them through the long, and often tedious, stages of disciplined language study. Our Stage Two students would not be a conscripted, but a self-selected, clientele with considerable experience in the area and an autonomous desire to do what they were doing.

I can already hear the old objections: Isn't this lowering standards? How are we going to test these courses across the board so as to satisfy administrators and parents? (For too long we have allowed the latter problem to hamstring our endeavors at realistic change.) There need be no "lowering of standards." Since the objectives will be different, we will expect different outcomes, a different type of achievement, and we will design different tests to conform with our objectives. We will expect to test, for instance, for certain understandings, for certain attitudes, for a new freedom we hope our students will have

achieved. Such a test may very well mean no test at all in the conventional sense of the word. The present approach arouses hostility and frustration in many. Isn't it time, then to consider new structures and a new content more congruent with the thinking and aspirations of the present generation of students?

Obviously such an approach will involve careful planning and preparing of materials, with perhaps pilot projects to work out the best way of proceeding. The present situation requires some intensive original thinking. As a profession, I believe we are capable of carrying such a project through.

I cannot dwell here on Stage Two which will be more akin to the language learning situation to which we are acustomed. We would, however, now have a better motivated and a better prepared group, both from the point of view of linguistic awareness and cultural comprehension, a group which had chosen to study the language with the acknowledged purpose of seeking a high degree of mastery. What more could we ask for? Here I could say much about our need to shift gears too if we wish to conserve this group through the necessarily laborious period of developing comfortable competence of operation in the foreign tongue.

But let us not just talk or listen. Let use get down to some hard study and planning for the implementation of such a program.

NOTES

1. Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), p. 11

2. Toffler, p. 343.

3. This view is put forward by Kenneth Keniston, Department of Psychology, Yale University, in "You Have to Grow Up in Scarsdale to Know How Bad Things Really Are," New York Times Magazine, April 27, 1969, reprinted in The University Crisis Reader, Vol. 2: Confrontation and Counterattack, eds. I. Wallerstein and P. Starr, (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 453-68.

4. Toffler, p. 402.

5. N. Postman and C. Weingartner, Teaching as a Subversive Activity. (New York: Delacorte, 1969), p. 18.

6. Toffler, pp. 409-10.

7. Toffler, p. 410.

8. Keniston, pp. 464-5.

9. E. Stevick, Adapting and Writing Language Lessons. (Washington, D. C.: Department of State, 1971), p. 14.

10. "Teacher-Student Relations: Coercion or Cooperation" in New Teachers for New Students. (Seattle and New York: Washington Foreign Language Program and A.C.T.F.L., 1970), p. 46.

11. Quoted by A. E. Lean in And Merely Teach. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), p. 58.

12. D. P. Ausubel, Educational Psychology: A Cognitive View. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 390.